

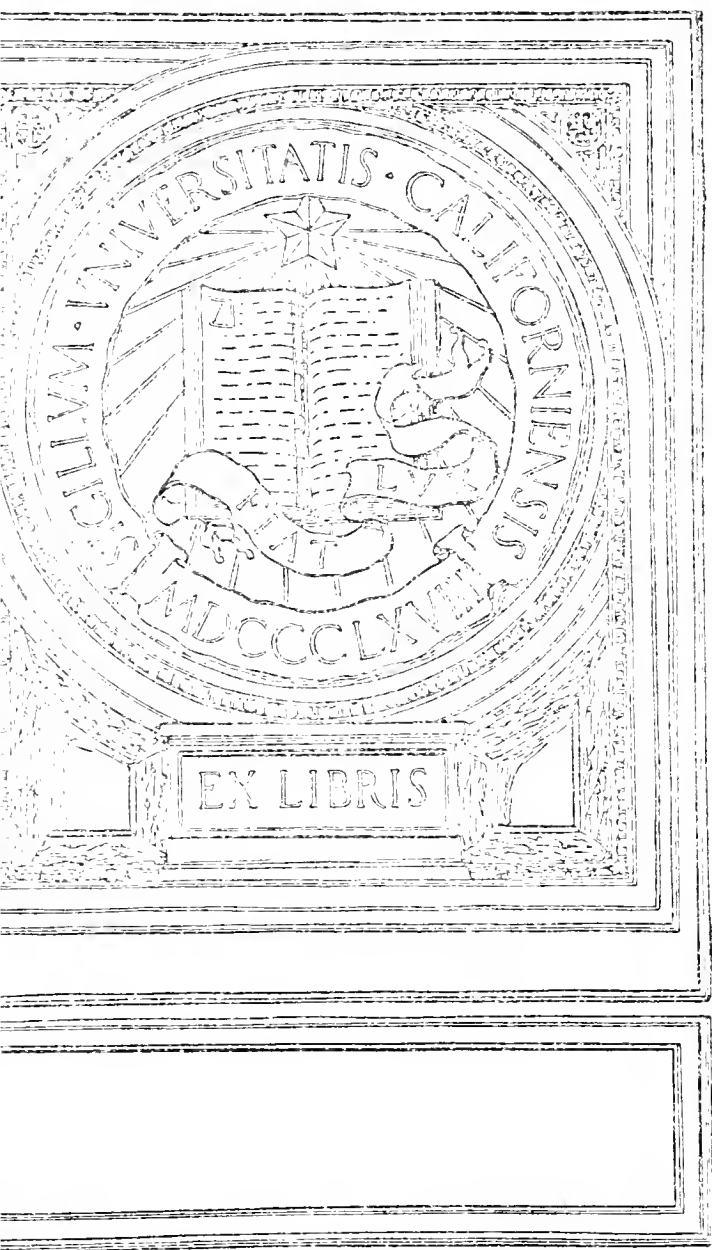
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Addresses at the Several Receptions in
Honor of the Royal Italian War Com-
mission in New York, June 21-23, 1917

By

Nicholas Murray Butler

Chairman of the Mayor's Committee on Reception

New York

1917

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I

Address delivered at the official reception of the Royal Italian War Commission at the City Hall, New York, June 21, 1917

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, and Gentlemen: This is an hour and this is an experience which make history for New York and for the nation. You have heard from the lips of His Honor the Mayor of the welcome which the City tenders to this company of men of affairs and men of state who come bearing high commission from the government and the people of Italy. You have seen in the crowded streets through which you have passed, you have heard from the voices of the school-children and their elders, the acclaim which is in every American heart as you put foot in our great cosmopolitan capital. The Mayor has said that this is a peculiar city. New York is a great city; too great for envy. New York is a powerful city; too powerful for boasting. New York is a generous city; too generous to feel the need to extol the art of giving. New York is a patriotic city; too patriotic to be satisfied with the service of the lips. For nearly three years the population of this great metropolis has watched with tense expectancy the movement of opinion beyond the sea, and when the time came that Italy saw its duty and prepared to do it, the finger of fate pointed to a quick coming of the day when the experience of the United States would be the same.

This is no ordinary war. This is no war prosecuted by allied peoples and by allied armies with hymns of hate upon their lips. This is no war of conquest. This is no war of destruction. This is a war of a kind which Italy knows so well—a war to unify and to free men. May one suppose that the great peace-loving, industrious population of the United States could be turned from their occupations to take up arms at this day in the history of the world on any but an issue which stirs men's souls, which appeals to men's consciences, and which holds men's intelligences in the tight grip of everlasting principle? Nothing less could have brought Italy, nothing less could have brought the United States, into this contest which is to be prosecuted, be the day soon or far, until the aims for which it has been undertaken are secure beyond human peradventure. The world has no intention of repeating this experience. It proposes by the aid of Italian arms, by the aid of Italian patriotism, by the aid of Italian ideals, and by the aid of Italian devotion, to write a page in the record book of the world's history which can never be erased or turned back.

You are welcomed with heartiness and welcomed with acclaim by this great population. The nearly eight hundred thousand among us who revere the name, the tongue, the traditions of Italy and in whose veins runs Italian blood, are of the very stock and stuff of our best citizenship. They are gathered here in great and representative number. They have lined the streets through which we have come, and they will line the streets through

which we are yet to go. They represent a bond—a bond which is human and therefore immortal—between the sun-kissed land from which they came and this bounteous land across the sea which they have made their home. It is not that they love Italy less, but that they have found here a new opportunity to go forward in those paths which most warmly appeal to them; and this they can do with no breach of tradition, no break of affections, no sundering of ancient and familiar and beloved ties. That is why this great element of our metropolitan population is so sternly and so strongly American, and why it is at the same time so fond of the name and the fame of Italy. That is why it represents a bond, a bridge, an invisible bridge, across the great ocean over which ideas and accomplishments come and go, pass and re-pass, as the great human tide flows on to make itself felt in the accomplishment of liberty. That is the keynote that we strike at the opening of these memorable days. These are days that we do not forget, because they stir our souls. These are days that we cannot forget, for they make us into new men.

We greet Your Royal Highness and Your Excellencies. We greet in you not only high Commissioners of a sovereign and a friendly State, but leaders of a great people, engaged with the free peoples of the world in a crusade to rescue the sacred places of liberty from those who would destroy them.

II

Address delivered at the luncheon given in honor of the Royal Italian War Commission by the Merchants' Association of New York, at the Hotel Astor, June 22, 1917

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, and Gentlemen: This is an exceptional gathering of a thousand merchants and men of affairs of New York. You have come in the midst of a busy day to bid welcome to this distinguished company of representatives of the Government and the people of Italy, and to pledge once more, publicly and with heartiness, the fullest possible support and cooperation of our people in this great enterprise which we have joined together to undertake.

You are merchants and bankers greeting representatives of a nation where banking was almost invented, and coming from contact with a commerce which looks back to the ports of Venice and of Genoa in the palmy days of the very beginnings of the overseas trade of the world. We meet today under these circumstances because there is not merely a friendly cooperation of Governments, but because there is a complete understanding of peoples. Where the hearts of two great peoples beat in unison, a formal alliance between Governments is wholly unnecessary.

We have embarked with our ally Italy, and with our allies France, Great Britain, and the rest, upon what I described just now as a great enterprise; and

that, gentlemen, is a joint enterprise, to be prosecuted jointly to a conclusion that shall not be traded away, bit by bit, but that shall be made the basis for a new world order.

Voices come to us from one land and another, asking the consideration of separate peace. Remember, gentlemen, one of the most ancient of fables; how easy it was to break every fagot singly and how impossible to break them when bound together by a common strand. There is only one way in which the Teutonic Powers can win this war or bring it to a drawn battle, and that is by dividing the Allies, by breaking one by one, fagot by fagot, the concerted opposition to militarism which has now stirred every free and liberty-loving people in this world.

We are approached with seductive formulas: 'There must be no indemnities', and 'There must be no annexations of territory'. Perhaps not; but just what do those words mean? If by indemnity is meant the old-fashioned mediæval system of punitive indemnity, no; we have outgrown all that. But if by no 'indemnity' is meant that those who have ravaged and ravished Belgium and France and Serbia and Roumania and Poland are not to restore those peoples to their homes, I very greatly mistake! We may not even discuss that question, however indirectly, with an enemy, for it goes to the very bottom of this war. If a great series of public crimes has been committed, those public crimes must be atoned for in the only way that is possible.

No payment of money can bring back the precious lives that were sunk on the *Lusitania*! No payment

of money can restore shattered Louvain and ravished Termonde! No payment of money can rebuild the Cathedral at Rheims! No payment of money can bring back those burned and ravished villages in Serbia and in Poland! For those crimes the everlasting execration of history is the penalty. Gentlemen, those names will remain figures of speech for baseness and cruelty a thousand years from now! But a payment that will do something to make good the private losses and damages inflicted on every hand is not a punitive indemnity; it is a legal fine to be collected by process of public law.

And then, gentlemen, we are approached with another seductive phrase—‘There are to be no annexations’. What does that mean? If by ‘annexations’ is meant the violent transferring of territory to a new sovereign against the will of its people, certainly not. That, too, is a mediæval conception that we have outgrown. But, if by ‘annexation’ is meant returning a child to its mother, we shall insist upon it!

Alsace and Lorraine were stolen before the sight of all the world and they must be given back! Italia Irredenta, with its great population held forcibly under Hapsburg rule, would not be annexed—it would be brought home!

These, gentlemen, are the answers that are on our lips and in our hearts to those who would seduce us with formulas. We are simple men of affairs. We sign a bond only after reading its terms. We wish to know the meaning of these words and we shall not permit the honeyed sounds of rhetoric or sentiment to cloud our vision as to what words mean.

‘No indemnities’? Certainly not. ‘No annexation’? Certainly not! But restoration, restitution, and the return home of stolen and scattered children!

Gentlemen, all these great questions might not have been solved in the ordinary processes of evolution for a hundred years. It might have taken one generation after another before these hard problems of public law and public policy could have been raised for solution. They were raised when the cruel hand of militarism was lifted to strike an innocent neutral nation. Prussian militarism has made its bed; now let it lie in it!

III

Address delivered at the dinner given by the Mayor of the City of New York in honor of the Royal Italian War Commission, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, June 22, 1917.

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, and Gentlemen: This notable demonstration is a fitting climax to your welcome to the City of New York. It reveals with new emphasis the sincerity, the conviction and the purpose of this City and of the nation. There are still ringing in our ears the acclaim given but a few short weeks ago to the distinguished Commissions from France and from Great Britain. This hall has seen many distinguished and representative gatherings, but never has it seen gatherings more distinguished, more representative, or more significant, than those which gathered then and now. They include the whole citizenship of New York, regardless of party, regardless of faith, regardless of social distinction; that whole citizenship speaks with one voice in its welcome to this company of eminent Italians.

Tonight the name that is on our lips, the thought that is in our hearts, the history and achievements which we like to recall, are those of Italy. That nation binds together the ancient world and the world in which we live. Take it away and history in its continuity is destroyed. That nation is the link between East and West. Over its plains and mountains and through its gates have come for two thousand

years a great procession of ideas and ideals to make the civilization which is ours, and which we at this moment are in arms to defend.

Strike out Italy and there goes at one blow the best of the world's art; its painting, its sculpture, its music, its architecture, are hopelessly wrecked and destroyed. Strike out Italy and the world's poetry and letters, the world's science and practical accomplishment, are broken in half. Strike out Italy and ancient Rome has no place in which to die, while the Renaissance and the modern spirit have no cradle in which to be born. Gentlemen, we cannot strike out Italy from history unless we are prepared to wreck the world.

Do not forget that the Government of Italy first pointed out to an anxious and listening world the fact that this war was a war of aggression by the Central Powers that undertook it. There were conditions under which Italy was in alliance with those Powers, but they were not conditions which bound it to a war of aggression on a feeble people, and when the Government of Austria-Hungary took its aggressive steps towards Serbia and called upon Italy to follow, the Government of Italy wrote its name high in history, in indelible letters, when it not only refused to follow but denounced that act as an aggression in the face of the world.

That, gentlemen, is Italy's crowning service to our generation, if she had never sent a soldier to the front and had never won a battle. She penetrated the moral and intellectual disguise under which this

contest was forced upon the world. When she called us all to witness, we opened our eyes and saw.

And now, thank God, we are side by side with Italy and France and Great Britain and Russia and Japan and the rest, in this stupendous undertaking. Gentlemen, the chief obstacle to its success is our self-confident optimism that the war is already won. Do not mistake: those of you who heard this afternoon the convincing and eloquent demonstrations by Signor Arlotta and Senator Marconi, those of you who listened to those demonstrations, know that this contest is not won and will not be won until America puts every bit of its strength and fibre into it.

It will not do, gentlemen, to saunter into war; it will not do to talk about war; it will not do to pass resolutions about war. A stupendous contest is on and the fate of the principles upon which this nation rests, is at stake. We have started, with Italy and France and Great Britain, on a quest like that of Jason of old in his search for the golden fleece. We have started to win a war for a new world. The old world, the world of 1914, the world at home, the world abroad, the world in its domestic conditions, the world in its international relations, that world has gone forever. We have started out in quest of a new world, and this war is at bottom a contest as to whether that new world is to be a place in which men shall live in freedom rather than in fear, in peace rather than in perpetual dread of war; whether it is to be a world of opportunity or a world of despotism; whether it is to be a world in which every individual is called upon to give his best that he may

be his best, or a world in which every individual shall take the place that is assigned him by a higher power to do another's will, and subject to no appeal. We are searching for a new world. As Governor Hughes said so finely this afternoon, it is a new world in the very sense in which those navigators of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries set out upon their voyages.

This world is near at hand, or else it does not exist at all. Either this new world is where we can go out and find it, and by our resourcefulness and our courage and our skill can create it, or else this new world is in the distant clouds and is a thing of dreams. If, gentlemen, this new world of peace and happiness and prosperity and opportunity and freedom—if this new world of which we are in search—is a dream, then the greater portion of the human race is dreaming. If that is a hopeless vision, then the greater portion of the human race is absorbed in contemplating the unpractical, because, as if sundered by a knife, mankind finds itself in two great camps, professing two opposing faiths, pursuing two opposite ideals, hopelessly in contradiction, not to be compromised, and one to be victorious by force. Never in all history has just such an issue been presented to men before, and that issue presented to Italy, to France, to Great Britain, to America, awaits decision at the hands of our capacity and of our courage.

There are very few American schoolboys who have not at one time or another written an essay or delivered an oration on the topic 'Beyond the Alps lies Italy'. Every schoolhouse in the land has held up

the Alps as the great obstacle to endeavor, and Italy as the rich, happy, and fortunate reward of conquest. Hannibal carried his troops from Africa across the Alps to reduce ancient Rome; Cæsar sent his legions across the Alps to the conquest of Gaul and Britain; Napoleon led his troops across the Alps, building roads which are a model of engineering construction at this moment; and now Cadorna, at the head of the Italian hosts, is seated on the very summit of the Alps surrounded by his heroic troops armed with the heaviest ordnance known to modern warfare, where Hannibal and Cæsar and Napoleon were glad to go by the lowest passes. It is the most astounding achievement in the whole history of war, this Italian army hurling itself at miles of Alpine peaks, every fastness held by a skilled and well-armed enemy, in order to assist your enterprise and mine, in order to make Italy free, united, independent, and safe.

We know, gentlemen, we all of us know the splendid story; we know, and our city bears the marks of our knowledge, of Mazzini, the prophet and the seer; of Cavour, the master builder; of Garibaldi, the citizen soldier; and of the calm, penetrating judgment of Victor Emmanuel, first ruler of free, united, and independent Italy.

What Italy struggled for in her internal development for two generations, she is struggling for at this moment for all mankind. She has gained for herself the aim which she sought, and now, with calm serenity, with sincere conviction, with generous sacrifice, she adds her power, her hosts, her traditions, and her ideals to this great contest over human principle.

And do you say that we cannot find a new world? Do you say that the obstacles are too great; that human greed and human selfishness and human desire for power, and all the long list of other human failings, are so many and so great, that our new world, for which we profess to be fighting, must remain a land of dreams; that it is beyond the reach of the practical in life, and that no armies, no victories, no conquests, no arguments, can ever reach it? If that be your question, you are pointing to the Alps. In answer I say to you, Beyond those Alps lies Italy.

IV

The address delivered at the Stadium of the College of the City of New York on the occasion of the assembly of the Italian Societies, June 23, 1917, was not reported.

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